

# The Standards of Bakersville

By  
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YOU'VE been crying, Effie. You aren't strong enough to see company yet."

"It wasn't that. Mrs. Joyner eyed the baby all over, and then she said: 'What nice little ears she has!' and old Mrs. Morris remarked in a comforting sort of way: 'But I've always noticed the ugliest children make the prettiest grown people.'"

"They're just a pair of cackling geese, they don't know a fine youngster when they see one. I'm sure she weighed nine and a half pounds! As for her looks, all babies are exactly alike, can't be told apart. Goodness, Effie, you aren't crying again?"

"I—I am afraid I don't think she is pretty either," confessed his wife between sobs. "I cannot understand why I should have a daughter with red hair."

But red it was, and straight it was, in spite of Mrs. Wyatt's frantic efforts to the contrary. She brushed it backwards fifty times every morning, yet it remained as flagrantly straight as it was indisputably red. When Madeline was older her mother braided it into innumerable small plaits at night to make it ripple next day.

Trying to fall asleep one night, a process hindered in spite of her perfect health, by the discomfort caused by the many braids, Madeline overheard her mother in plaintive monologue. Her name, by the way, was of her mother's choosing; her father called her Lina.

"John, I just don't know what to do about dancing-school. I took Madeline this afternoon, and dressed her as sweetly as could be, though it is very hard to find anything becoming to her (now I could always wear any color) and the boys simply wouldn't dance with her. Madeline seemed absorbed in the music, and stood there, as unconscious as if she was in our back yard, swaying with the music and taking all sorts of queer steps she must have made up herself. Some of the girls began to laugh, and Gus Behman said: 'I think her dancing looks real pretty,' and they all made fun of him, and the boys said he liked green-eyed girls and teased him so he wouldn't dance with her, and none of the boys did—and I was so mortified!"

"I hope she had sense enough not to let a fool row of giggling boys spoil her good time."

"She will never be a belle," moaned Mrs. Wyatt.

"Belle!" echoed Mr. Wyatt, with something resembling a snort, "I'm glad she won't. If my front steps were always swarming with small boys like Major Bridgers, I'd—I'd use insect powder to scatter 'em!"

"Annabel Bridgers has a way with her, all the boys like her," pursued Mrs. Wyatt. "It is strange that my niece should resemble me more than my own daughter. From the time I was fourteen, it was just that way with me. All the boys in Bakersville—"

"Yes, yes, I know," interrupted her husband, hastily. "But, my dear, it is enough to have married a belle; I don't want to be the father of one."

Alas, Madeline, never again heard urged this point of view, which would have contributed so much to her peace of mind in the years that followed! For Mr. Wyatt died, and his widow's narrowed interests concentrated on her daughter.

The years before her marriage, when it was a foregone conclusion that any voting contest for "the prettiest girl in Bakersville," or "the most popular young lady in town" would register an additional triumph for Effie Bridgers shone in undimmed glory in Effie Wyatt's remembrance.

All that earnest maternal effort could do to give an equally radiant period to her daughter, she unflinchingly attempted.

Mrs. Wyatt had been plump, blue-eyed, brown-haired, rosy-cheeked, indeed, poppy-cheeked might be more exact. In spite of the difficulty of her material, she tried to bring Madeline to this standard. The girl's height and slenderness were lessened by numberless ruffles on her skirts, Madeline's "queer walk" changed into the Bakersville fashionable gait by the ample means of inordinately high-heeled shoes. Madeline's hair was Marcelled and pompadoured, and adorned at the back with a bunch of curls.

But no loving effort could make Madeline's eyes but that strange sea-green, and the only

Madeline's cheeks rosy would have

sort to those external applications which Mrs. Wyatt did not consider reputable for a church member in good standing. Though she tabooed paint and powder, mechanical beautifiers invariably tempted her. There was a memorable July in which she insisted that Madeline should sleep in a rubber face mask, but mask, flesh-brushes and electric appliances failed to give to the girl's cheeks the famous color that characterized the erstwhile Belle of Bakersville.

Madeline bore these experiments patiently and passively, because she loved her mother dearly. Hers was a sweet nature, for even the realization of hopeless homeliness, which had filled her soul with humility, had not embittered her. Her chief source of pleasure lay in those village epidemics called amateur performances.

"Why is Madeline always given the nicest part?" Annabel complained, not recognizing that her cousin had redeemed the character from the commonplace.

The one drop of comfort in Mrs. Wyatt's cup was that Gus Behman came regularly to see her daughter.

He paid Madeline but little public attention, probably he asked himself what was the use of taking a girl to a ball whom the other fellows wouldn't dance with! He escorted her to the occasional plays which came to their town, because he enjoyed hearing her quick appreciation of any good point, or her criticism and suggestion. On these occasions it was trying to feel that he was being pitied as generally as Annabel Bridgers' escort was being envied. Yet, somehow, he liked Madeline, he even liked to look at her! This secretly alarmed him. He feared it might be a sign that he was falling in love with her. He was a careful and scrupulous youth, inclined to be stout, and he liked to keep his hand on the pulse of his emotions.

The only son of its richest merchant, Gus was re-



"ED'S FURIOUS," WHISPERED ANNABEL.

garded as the catch of Bakersville, and he had a proper sense of the responsibilities of his position. Annabel Bridgers, in appearance almost exactly what her aunt had been twenty years before, was the town's acknowledged belle, but Gus secretly opined that he could give the other fellows a close call if he had a mind to the running.

Annabel had a birthday, and she determined to celebrate it with particular pomp—something even gayer than progressive euchre.

"I've decided on a German. Whom shall I put with Madeline, Aunt Effie?" she asked. "On each boy's invitation I'm writing the name of the girl I want him to take."

"Oh, put her with Gus. He drops in once or twice a week."

"As often as that?"

"Yes, indeed, maybe oftener."

Annabel said nothing. She could not understand why Gus should be the only one of the young men who seemed oblivious to her charms. He couldn't be really in love with that long, lanky Madeline; perhaps he was just shy, and using her cousin as a blind; perhaps he needed a little encouragement.

Poor Mrs. Wyatt outdid all her previous efforts on Madeline's ball-gown. From waist to hem it was a mass of organdie ruffles, and every ruffle had the lace whipped on by hand. In her youth she would have looked like a delectable doll-baby in just such a gown, but it gave her daughter the appearance of being encased in a beffounced barrel.

Puffs and pompadour increased the semblance of height until Madeline seemed an inch taller than her stout escort. But in the dark he could not discern this, and as they walked along, Gus had the sense of pleasure, of restlessness, that he always had in listening to the girl's voice.

"I thought it would be nicer to walk," he said. "Don't think I'm stingy about carriage hire."

"I don't," she answered simply. "The flowers you sent are lovely, Gus. Only—"

"Only what?"

"I didn't mean to say it. Only I was sorry that mamma would put one in the back of my hair. It's right over my ear, and the thorns stick. Mamma said that she once wore a pink rose like this and a young man told her she looked like a picture he had seen of Napoleon's first love."

"You certainly are a good daughter," Gus exclaimed, with impetuosity unusual for him. "I don't believe Mrs. Wyatt realizes how yielding and obedient you always are. I tell you I realize it! You are the best girl I ever saw, Madeline, and—and there is something I've been thinking of telling you for a long time. You must have seen that I—oh, pshaw, there is the Bridgers' house! I'll tell you on the way home."

However, when they stood in the light of the ball-room, his emotions, roused more than they had ever been in his well-regulated life, received a distinct shock from the queer appearance Madeline presented, with the large pink rose in her red hair. She danced well, but it was not a la Bakersville.

Annabel, in a fluffy blue frock, looked her prettiest. In the cotillion figure which Bakersville considered

most amusing, a girl was seated at the end of the room, while her partner brought up half a dozen men, to each of whom she gave an apple. The first one who could eat his apple and asked in a clear, unchoked voice, "May I have the honor?" danced with the girl.

Gus was one of the candidates, and rather to his own surprise finished his apple first. He saw black wrath in Ed Davis' face, as the latter choked over his pippin, with the prize already lost.

"Ed's furious," whispered Annabel, as she and Gus glided over the floor.

"Because I finished first?"

Her voice dropped a bit lower, shyly. Her pretty brown head was very near his shoulder.

"He saw that I gave you the smallest apple."

Flattered Gus forgot the warnings of Adam and Paris, and that from time immemorial the apple has been the fruit of temptation.

"We ought to be awfully good friends," went on Annabel, looking up at him with big, blue eyes. It was nice to have a girl look up at you, not to have her eyes on a level with yours. "I guess we'll be cousins some day. Aunt Effie has been telling us how often you come to see Madeline, that you're just around there all the time. Somehow you and I have never happened to see much of each other, but it will be different after we are kin, won't it? I haven't any brother, and you can advise me, and tell me what you think of my men friends—won't you, Cousin Gus? You know I have such confidence in your judgment of people."

The music stopped, and some one claimed Annabel before Gus could frame a reply.

Madeline had few partners; she was oftener in her seat than any girl in the room, while Annabel was besieged with applicants. Gus was standing gloomily by the wall during an intermission, in which Mrs. Wyatt had borne her daughter off to the dressing-room for certain repairs to the coiffure, when he overheard a stranger speaking. It was Mrs. Gilvery, who, after a long and successful career on the stage, had returned to see the little town of her nativity.

"Who is that girl who has just passed? The one with the wonderful nose, I mean?"

"That's poor Madeline Wyatt," replied the woman questioned. "So plain, isn't she? I, too, have no-

marry a girl whose queer appearance would constantly excite comment. With a sudden sense of relief that he had not yet committed himself, he went over to dance again with Annabel.

On the way home he felt awkward and constrained. Madeline was abstracted, and they walked on in silence. As they drew near the house he said, with an evident effort at sang-froid:

"By the way, I mentioned that there was something I wanted to tell you. You and I have always been awfully good friends, Madeline, so I'll confide in you that I believe I'm half-way in love with that little flirt of a cousin of yours. You'll help me, won't you? She has an idea I'm in love with you, you know."

"I'll undeceive her," replied Madeline. "Good-night, Gus."

As the door closed, mingled with his appreciation of his brilliantly clever exit from his predicament was a realization of the trailing sweetness of Madeline's voice.

"Mother, I've a great deal to talk to you about," said Madeline, going straight to Mrs. Wyatt's room. Quietly she repeated Gus's conversation on the way to the dance, and on the return. She felt shocked at the grayness which came into her mother's face.

"Oh, mother, don't look like that! I'm glad, glad! If Gus had asked me to marry him, I should have said yes because I knew your heart was set upon it—but I didn't want to. To-night I had a long talk with Mrs. Gilvery. She kept looking at me, and then she asked me to come and sit by her. Mother, it is all so wonderful. She wishes me to go back to New York with her. I told her how I have always longed to go on the stage, and she believes I can, if I work hard."

And in the end Mrs. Wyatt consented.

To Madeline, who had never before left Bakersville, New York was a bewildering puzzle, and then a growing fascination. Perhaps every hour of her life brought deepening appreciation of the generosity and insight of the great-hearted woman who had befriended her. She met friends of Mrs. Gilvery's, with names that glittered in electric lights and were emblazoned upon billboards, and their friendliness delighted her and developed her. The difference in her dress was one of the earliest sources of comfort to the girl. Her great coils of hair were arranged naturally, the high-heeled shoes were discarded, and gowns



SHE SUDDENLY TURNED AND FACED HER PURSUERS.

ticed what an odd nose she has; it looks like the pictures in ancient history—so old-fashioned! There isn't another like it in Bakersville."

"I doubt if there is another like it in the world," returned Mrs. Gilvery emphatically.

Gus moved away. Yes, Madeline was a good girl, and he liked her voice, but it would be incongruous for the only son of the Behman Supply Company to

of the simplest cut substituted for the beffounced creations over which her mother had labored.

No one could have thrown herself into her work with more absorbed devotion than Madeline did. Her whole soul was filled with wonder and gratitude; her passionate endeavor was to prove worthy of the friends who believed in her. Her mother was well satisfied to keep her away from Bakersville during the

somewhat intermittent progress of Gus Behman's wooing. In Bakersville phraseology, he "rushed" Annabel, but hesitated for months on the brink of committing himself. At the psychic juncture when unwise Mrs. Wyatt had begun to boast of Gus's attentions to her daughter, her more astute niece showed a sudden indifference, and began to play Ed Davis' against him. This piqued Gus into determining to master the situation; and so successful were his efforts that the Behman Supply Company was henceforth to have the privilege of settling pretty Annabel's bills—by no means limited.

They had chosen New York for their wedding journey, and as Mrs. Wyatt was going to town for her daughter's first appearance, they generously permitted her to accompany them.

"It'll be comforting to know there's somebody from Bakersville to take my last words in case there's a wreck," said the good soul. "Madeline has sent us tickets for the first night. She is appearing in a stage version of 'Hypatia.'"

"I haven't had much chance to talk with Madeline yet," said Mrs. Wyatt, when the usher showed her to the seats where the Behmans were already installed.

"I suppose she asked all about the wedding?" questioned Annabel complacently.

"She was so busy, I guess that's why she forgot," apologized the mother.

"How does she look?"

"Well, I don't think New York clothes are becoming to her, they are so awfully plain. I've sent her a good allowance, but I guess Mrs. Gilvery's a poor manager. None of the child's frocks have much trimming; I must touch them up a bit. Some embroidered grapes down the front of her best dress would help it wonderfully."

The curtain rose on a street scene in Alexandria, with all the faithfulness of detail and lavish perfection of setting which mark the master of stage craft. Pupils, philosophers and followers thronged the marble steps of the lecture-room, discussing in a fragmentary fashion the tension between governor and bishop, while they waited in growing impatience for the coming of their divinity.

Mrs. Wyatt was conscious of overwhelming, sickening disappointment as her daughter came on the stage. Surely as leading lady she ought to be privileged to wear fine clothes and a curly, brown wig—and oh, heavens! was she nearly barefooted?

But the trained metropolitan eye saw at a glance the fluted glory of red hair, the queenly poise of the small head, the Parian whiteness of the throat and arms, the exquisite symmetry of outline, the profile purely Greek as Athens, but truly woman!

There was a splendid burst of applause, which deepened as the audience caught the first direct look of her eyes, dark-browed, dark-lashed, dark-pupilled, the iris a wonderful green, like a peaceful sea. But even her beauty was not more alluring than her voice, with so plaintive a minor in its notes of liquid gold, or her supple grace of movement. So might the Winged Victory have walked in the morning of the nations.

"I wish Madeline would talk a little louder," whispered Mrs. Wyatt nervously. "She just seems to forget that she's acting. Why, the slave who didn't have but a line to say said it a great deal louder and with more elocution than Madeline."

"But I couldn't understand her, and I can hear every word Madeline says," defended Gus.

"Aunt Effie is quite right," said Annabel. "Anybody could tell that the slave really isn't a slave, but Madeline is behaving just as if she was born and raised in Greece—she doesn't seem like herself at all. I call that affectation, not acting."

The monks were chanting vespers, and as the last note died away they seemed to melt into the gathering dimness as they slipped out of the great doors of the cathedral. Twilight fell into darkness. There was no light save the rays shed by the altar candles on the white Crucifix. Far off there came a dull, hoarse cry, strangely in contrast with the peaceful evensong of the monks. It grew and deepened into that appalling, inhuman undertone which means the blood-thirst, horrible to hear from a pursuing pack of wolves, but more awful, more unnatural, from a mob of frenzied human beings. They were driving their quarry to the church; their raucous yells echoed from the vaulted roof as they swept her up to the very altar.

There she suddenly turned and faced her pursuers. Her glorious hair was disheveled and fell about her bared shoulders, from which fanatics had torn the robe. In her white purity, in her exquisite youthfulness, her face pale, but with eyes calm and unafraid, for a moment she stood at sanctuary under the Cross. Then the maddened mob beat about her, swept her down in their wolfish force—and the lights flickered, went out, and deep darkness fell.

There was silence in the audience for a moment, the sound of women sobbing, and then the lights flashed on, and wave after wave of tumultuous applause demanded the star.

The happy tears were running down Mrs. Wyatt's cheeks. A cub reporter rushed by to write his copy. "The most beautiful creature in the world!" they heard him exclaim.

"I always thought—" began Gus, and stopped. Annabel was sticking in her hatpins with unnecessary vigor, and he knew that was a danger signal.

"Tastes differ," she snapped. "I am glad to say the standards of Bakersville are very different from those of New York."

Next Week, **THE FOILING OF LYDIA**

By  
Porter Emerson Browne